

YXE: Beyond Boundaries

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By

Sheila Dawn Janzen

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Coordinator, MFA in Writing  
University of Saskatchewan  
Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity  
Division of Humanities and Fine Arts  
Room 509  
9 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
S7N 5A5

## ABSTRACT

In this post-apocalyptic epic set after the collapse of the Digital Age, the region of YXE finds itself at war. Fifteen-year-old Petra seeks to save his pod from the Grunthers, a nomadic tribe of mutineers that have triggered a resurgence of the deadly disease known as rouge. In addition to facing the Grunthers, Petra must also deal with conflicts that have arisen between the settlers from other pods and his own, and the challenges within his own family. After his grandfather's untimely death, Petra suddenly finds himself the leader of their pod. With the help of his friend Avery, he learns that loyalty comes from actions not mere words, and battles towards survival at all costs. In the meantime, Samuel is also fighting for the survival of his tribe, the Grunthers, while his wife languishes with a fatal case of rouge. There is much at stake as Petra sets forth beyond boundaries to regain his land in YXE. For intermediate-age readers ages 11 and up.

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## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

When I was young, I would imagine futuristic worlds that seemed backward compared to contemporary society. Worlds peppered with fantastical elements. As a child, I loved speculative fiction. I wanted to read and identify with stories where the characters were from my homeland, Saskatchewan, but where improbable things could occur. As an adult, I hope to offer young readers the opportunity to see Saskatchewan landscapes in a new and exciting way through sci-fi/fantasy, to inspire youth not only to read, but also to write and explore their creativity.

As I began writing this novel, what emerged were elements of science fiction's sub-genre of post-apocalyptic fiction, as well as traits of fantasy. Research took me to a particular face of the sci-fi/fantasy genre called "science fantasy"—a mixed genre within the umbrella of speculative fiction. And although not clearly defined, the blended genre that I have named *post-apocalyptic science fantasy* best describes the choices I have made here. What has been liberating for me when creating this fictitious world is that science fantasy gives a scientific veneer of realism to things that simply could not happen in the real world. Rather than a documented account of what will or could happen in a post-apocalyptic world, science fantasy allows a platform from which the writer may take liberties to nudge a story beyond reality, pulling away from our world and creating something new and different. Science fantasy relies on the existence of fantasy or supernatural details, anything the imagination can conceive. Liam, for example, as the alchemist who extracts a cure for a malady that has the potential to drive pods of humans to extinction is most certainly a character based on science fantasy. This, as well as other aspects, pushes the story from post-apocalyptic science fiction into the realm of post-apocalyptic science fantasy.

Perspective. One of the greatest challenges I faced while writing this manuscript. I found it important to push what began as a simple single plotline into new territory, so I decided to alternate the perspectives of two separate characters from different and opposing communities. Having Petra's story told in first person has allowed the reader more communion with him, which holds the reader in a way that is not possible in third person; at the same time, having Samuel's alternating perspective appear from third person has allowed more liberties to the arc of the story, as well as scanning from various lenses. Both perspectives—first and third—invite the reader to identify with the struggles of morality and community in a unique and active way and realize that things are more complex than one character alone might understand.

To facilitate my understanding of alternating perspectives and appropriate choices for the intermediate audience ages 11-14, I studied Eliza Dresang's theory of Radical Change, which deals with how contemporary children's literature is pushing into new territory: changing forms and formats; changing perspectives; and changing boundaries. To date, there has been very little ventured in intermediate-age fantasy or sci-fi literature, let alone sci-fi/fantasy blends, that uses an alternating first person/third person perspective. There are, however, two examples that have been of great import in my research: *Skin Hunger*, by Kathleen Duey, and *The Amulet of Samarkand*, by Jonathan Stroud. Besides interrogating these books as a writer, with acute sensibilities towards how their authors achieved the genre, I looked into a wide variety of literature that deals with the complexities of human nature in an alternate world of struggle and honour. Within this variety emerged a few titles inspirational to my craft: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,

by George Orwell; *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess; *Divergent*, by Veronica Roth; *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins; and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

In terms of a plot line and a relationship between characters, I wanted to have opposing sides fold in towards the middle, into the grey. Both groups, the Unis and the Grunthers, start off in seemingly opposing positions of morality. Petra sees the world from a naïve perspective where things can either be good or bad, wrong or right. Samuel, on the other hand, appears to be more cynical and hardened towards anything outside of his immediate family. The lines of Good versus Evil seem far more distinct at the start of the novel: Petra, the protagonist; Samuel, the antagonist. The breaking point occurs as these two characters are pushed into making decisions as leaders. Both characters begin to come to terms with how dealing in absolutes is never useful. The desperation Petra feels in regaining his pod's home calls him to make choices that impair his good nature. At times he finds himself keeping secrets and complying with situations that go against his moral core. In turn, Samuel finds little resolve in his unadulterated methods when discovering these methods have not brought him what he wants, as well as the affect his actions have had on his children. Clichés exist in sci-fi and fantasy regarding Evil versus Good. I wanted to unpack these stereotypes and have the reader question: what is Evil? What is Good? Do these extremes even exist, and furthermore do they have any part in contemporary intermediate-age fiction? At what point are we forced to alter our moralities? What makes a protagonist or an antagonist, and what underpins change? Is the drive for change anything more than desire on both positions? Pushing boundaries beyond the expected has been something to strive for as an author. In this work, the reader is not only taken on a journey from the prairies of Saskatchewan to the west coast, but also on an exploration of the human condition.

The common theme of desire threads itself within this story between both the Uni Pod and the Grunthers. In order to protect their pods, both Petra and Samuel find solace in taking a piece of control by holding what the other wants. The desire for Petra to hold and control the cure for the illness *rouge* leads the story in many ways. The importance of the cure is whispered in dialogue between Petra and Liam within the first chapter, then again in chapter two when we meet Samuel. The desire of having the allegiance of the alchemist confirms this importance. The theme of desire presses through as Samuel takes control away from the Uni pod by taking their stronghold. Both have claimed what the other desires in order to regain control, and in turn protect their pod.

This novel was a journey, with a destination that barely resembles the draft initially written. The concept was simply to write a post-apocalyptic novel with a fifteen-year-old boy at the helm. It grew as I did. Bringing in mystical and magical elements to the story allowed mobility. The plotline became less rigid and unclear, more real somehow. As soon as I let go completely of concepts and impossibilities holding the story back, the world of imagination and make-believe began to flourish and colour in the initial sketch work. Incorporating fantasy elements into a post-apocalyptic world and bringing the impossible into the probable was exhilarating for me as a writer, giving me the energy to sustain the project to the completion of this thesis.

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